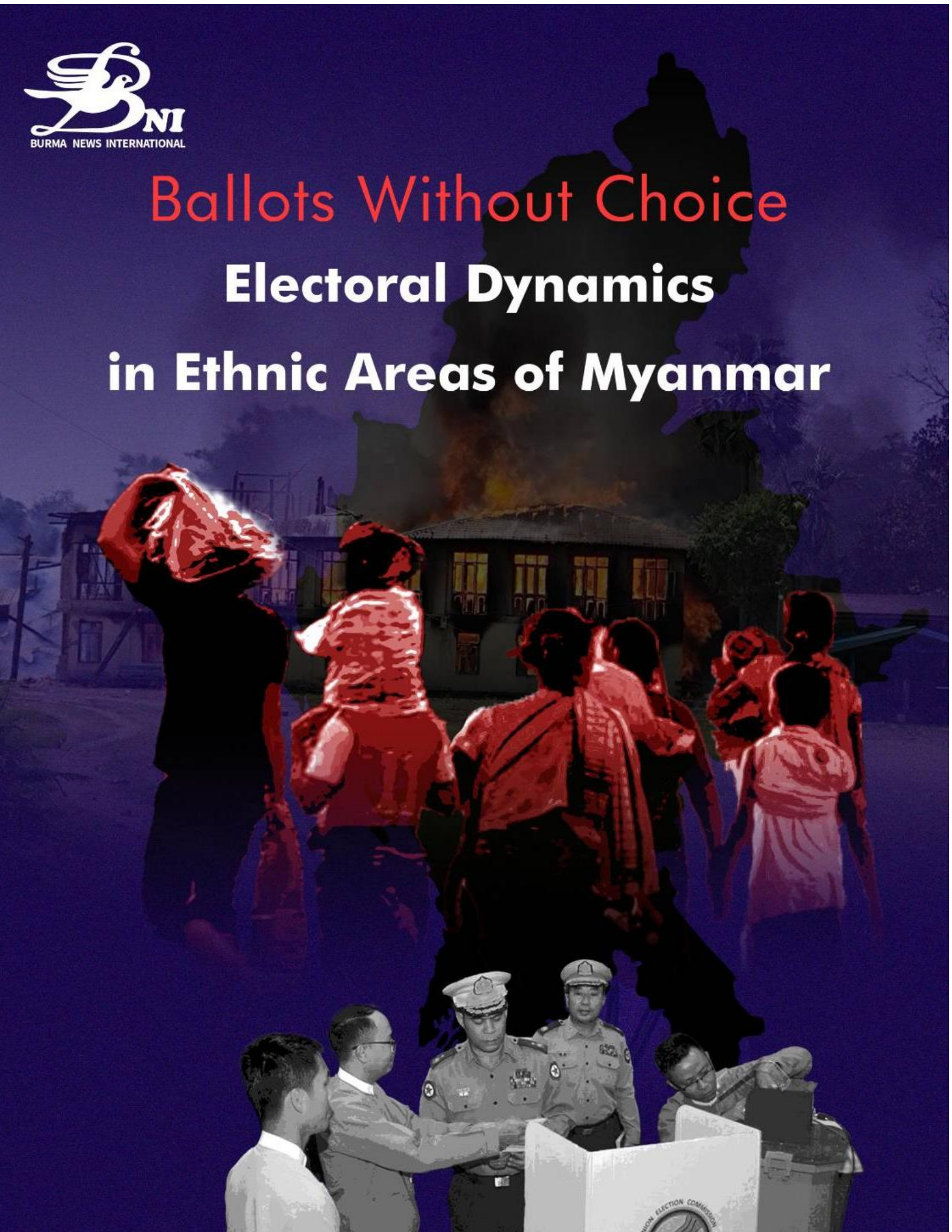
BURMA NEWS INTERNATIONAL

Ballots Without Choice

Electoral Dynamics in Ethnic Areas of Myanmar



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Executive Summary

The junta-orchestrated 2025 election was conducted within a highly constrained political and territorial environment, producing an outcome that overwhelmingly favored the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) while significantly limiting meaningful political competition. Although 57 political parties contested the election—including 29 ethnic-affiliated parties, of which 23 secured seats—electoral results were heavily skewed. Ethnic parties collectively won 155 out of 1,025 seats (15.12 percent), whereas the USDP secured approximately 739 seats (72.10 percent), dominating both legislative chambers. Structural factors such as advance voting—where the USDP derived over 40 percent of its votes in multiple constituencies—along with 31 uncontested seats (28 won by the USDP), further consolidated this dominance. These patterns indicate that the electoral framework functioned less as a competitive process and more as a controlled mechanism reinforcing military-aligned political authority.

A defining feature of the election was the sharp contraction of the electorate. The number of eligible voters declined from approximately 37–38 million in 2020 to 24.13 million in 2025, excluding more than 13 million people—around 35 percent of the previous electorate—due to displacement, territorial instability, and administrative restrictions. This exclusion was particularly severe in ethnic states, where large portions of territory were unable to participate. For example, only two out of nine townships in Chin State and three out of 17 in Rakhine State held elections, often with further exclusions at the ward and village levels. Nationwide, the military maintained full control in only 257 out of 350 townships (approximately 52 percent), while 91 towns had been captured by resistance forces since the 2021 coup. These conditions reflect not isolated disruptions but a broader fragmentation of territorial authority that fundamentally constrained the scope and inclusiveness of the electoral process.

The pre-election environment further limited political pluralism through restrictive legal frameworks and systematic suppression of opposition. The Political Parties Registration Law imposed stringent requirements that led to the dissolution of 40 parties in March 2023, including major actors such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and several prominent ethnic parties. Additional legal measures criminalized opposition activities, with over 400 individuals charged under election-related provisions by early 2026. As a result, the electoral landscape was reshaped prior to polling, with many key parties absent either due to forced dissolution or deliberate boycott. Combined with limited campaign space, weak voter education, and widespread insecurity, these constraints reduced both participation and competitiveness.

Voter turnout declined to approximately 54 percent—the lowest since 1990—reflecting low public confidence, displacement, and restricted access to polling. In many ethnic areas, participation was minimal, campaign activities were largely absent, and voters often lacked basic information about the election. Reports of coercion, particularly involving government employees, and the decisive role of opaque advance voting procedures further undermined the credibility of the process. Despite these constraints, voting patterns in some ethnic areas demonstrated localized resistance, with communities supporting ethnic-affiliated parties as alternatives to the USDP, often described as choosing the “lesser evil.”

Post-election dynamics indicate a high likelihood of continued military dominance. Many incumbent chief ministers and senior officials contested and won seats under the USDP, positioning themselves to retain power. The military leadership, including Senior General Min

Aung Hlaing, remains central to government formation, with expectations that key positions will be filled by existing military or junta-affiliated figures. This continuity suggests that the election serves primarily to repackage existing power structures under a nominally civilian framework.

Overall, the 2025 election is characterized by systemic exclusion, limited territorial reach, constrained political competition, and procedural irregularities. While formally conducted, the process lacks substantive inclusiveness and credibility. The resulting government faces a significant legitimacy deficit, as the election appears to have been structured to consolidate military authority rather than reflect the will of Myanmar's population.

Snapshot of Junta-Orchestrated Elections in Ethnic Areas

Despite widespread opposition and pressure from resistance groups and the public, the Myanmar military junta proceeded with its orchestrated election, conducting it in three phases. Phase (1) was held in 102 townships on 28 December 2025, Phase (2) in 100 townships on 11 January 2026, and Phase (3) in 61 townships on 25 January 2026. Altogether, voting was organized in 263 townships across the country. However, elections could not be held in 67 townships nationwide due to conflict, territorial control by resistance forces, and security constraints. Even within the 263 townships where elections were officially conducted, polling was not fully implemented, as voting did not take place in 216 wards and 3,682 village tracts, reflecting the highly restricted and uneven nature of the electoral process.

In the junta orchasted election, a total of 57 political parties contested the election, but only six were Union-level parties. Among them, 29 were ethnic-affiliated political parties, and 23 won seats. Ethnic-affiliated parties secured 155 out of 1,025 seats nationwide—only 15.12 percent of the total.[1] In contrast, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won approximately 739 out of 1,025 seats, or around 72.10 percent across all constituencies. Across all three phases combined, the USDP won 89 percent of Pyithu Hluttaw seats and 69 percent of Amyotha Hluttaw seats, consolidating dominance in both chambers.[2] Given the structural conditions under which the election was conducted—including the absence of the largest winning party from previous elections, as well as widespread territorial exclusions, low voter turnout, and the heavy reliance on administratively controlled advance voting—the overwhelming victory of the USDP is therefore hardly surprising. Rather than reflecting broad electoral competition, the results illustrate an electoral environment in which the military-backed party operated with decisive institutional and administrative advantages, shaping an outcome that predictably favored the regime's political vehicle.

Electoral Performance of Ethnic-Affiliated Parties

Political Parties	Seats
Shan and Nationalities Democratic Party	39
Pa O National Organization	18
Mon Unity Party	17
Kayin People's Party	3
Danu Nationalities Democracy Party	5
Kayin National Democratic Party	7

[1] Union Election Commission, Facebook post, February 10, 2026, "၂၀၂၅ ခုနှစ် ပါတီစုံဒီမိုကရေစီအထွေထွေရွေးကောက်ပွဲ နိုင်ငံရေးပါတီအလိုက် ခိုင်လုံမဲရရှိမှု အခြေအနေ ထုတ်ပြန်ကြေညာခြင်း," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0bPMCWPmUkrkAAxu8eNm64J3LgEuCmD7xLSPzQFkGgvewM3eHG7hsmS3GVJt5JowUl&id=100088755288730

[2] Burma Associated Press News (Facebook page), Facebook post, January 31, 2026, "စိတ်လှုပ်ရှားစရာမရှိတဲ့ စစ်တပ်ရဲ့ စိတ်ကြိုက်ရွေးကောက်ပွဲ အခြေအနေ အသေးစိတ်," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/burmaassociatedpressnews/posts/pfbid036C9ohKH8mdkZTsieTuNLxC6MFJqsT3ViNsdCJAbY23C8CXGeVopEGYijBHa8525h

Inn National League Party	4
Phalon-Swor Democratic Party	2
Naga National Party	12
Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party	4
Arakan Front Party	8
Kachin State People's Party	3
Shan-ni Solidarity Party (SSP)	5
Arakan National Party	6
Akha National Development Party	1
PaO National Unity Party	3
New Democratic Party (Kachin)	2
Kayah State People's Party (KySPP)	3
Lisu National Development Party (LNDP)	2
Wa National Party	1
Kokang Democracy and Unity Party (KDUP)	0
Mon Development Party	1
Pa-O National Development Party	1
Khami National Development Party	0
Zomi National Party	7
Rakhine State National Unity Party (RSUNP)	0
New Chinland Congress (NCC)	1
Mro National Development Party	0
Khumi National Party	0
	155

Pre-Election Environment

When assessing the overall electoral process, the pre-election environment of the junta-orchestrated election was already shaped by a number of structural and political constraints that significantly undermined the prospects for a free, fair, and legitimate electoral process. Several interrelated factors—including significant voter exclusion, anticipated low voter turnout, major geographical limitations on where voting could occur, uncontested seats and automatic victories, restrictive political party registration laws, opposition from political actors, and the military's limited territorial control and administrative capacity—collectively defined the conditions under which the election was organized. These dynamics shaped the electoral landscape well before polling day and constrained both participation and competition.

Voter Exclusion

One of the most significant and undeniable structural shifts in the junta-orchestrated election was the sharp contraction of the eligible voter population. In 2020, approximately 37–38 million citizens were eligible to vote. [3]By 2025, this number fell to 24.13 million. This represents the exclusion of more than 13 million people—roughly 35 percent of the previous electorate—due to internal displacement, residence in designated "unstable" townships, or administrative removal. The reduction reflects multiple overlapping factors, including widespread internal displacement caused by armed conflict, the exclusion of populations residing in townships designated by the authorities as "unstable," and administrative removals from voter lists. As a result, millions of citizens were effectively deprived of their fundamental political rights—the right to vote and to choose their representatives.

Within this context, the reported 54 percent voter turnout must be interpreted cautiously. Rather than reflecting genuine electoral participation, the figure is calculated from a dramatically reduced and territorially filtered electorate, in which a substantial portion of the population was structurally prevented from participating in the electoral process. The contraction of the voter base therefore represents not only a technical adjustment to the electorate but also a significant erosion of one of the most basic democratic rights: the ability of citizens to freely participate in choosing their Members of Parliament.

List of Voter Turn out and Eligible Voters.

Phase	Date	Townships	Eligible Voters	Valid Ballots	Turnout (%)
Phase 1	28 Dec 2025	102	11.60 million	6.00 million	52.13%
Phase 2	11 Jan 2026	100	7.59 million	4.24 million	55.95%

[3] Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), *Interim Report: International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) to the 2020 Myanmar General Elections* (Yangon: ANFREL, November 10, 2020), PDF file, https://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ANFREL-Interim-Report_IEOM-to-the-2020-Myanmar-General-Elections.pdf

Phase 3	25 Jan 2026	61	4.94 million	2.79 million	56.48%
Total	—	**263**	**24.13 million**	**13.03 million**	**54.00% (Avg)**

Across all phases combined, 13.03 million valid ballots were cast. However, the contraction of the voter base indicates that millions of citizens—particularly those in conflict-affected and ethnic areas—were excluded before polling even began.

Geographic Exclusion in Ethnic States[4]

The exclusion pattern in ethnic states reveals not isolated disruption but systemic territorial fragmentation. In Chin State, 84.31 percent of administrative units were excluded, and only two out of nine townships were able to hold elections. The process was therefore confined to limited urban centers, effectively silencing the rural majority. In Rakhine State, elections were held in only three out of 17 townships, and around 40 percent of wards and village tracts within those three townships were excluded. This indicates that the effective electoral footprint was significantly smaller than the township count suggests.

Karenni (Kayah) State saw three out of seven townships excluded entirely. Of the four townships where voting occurred, 48.57 percent of wards and village tracts were excluded. In Shan State, 17 out of 55 townships (30.91 percent) could not hold elections. Among the 38 townships where polling took place, 25.35 percent of wards and villages were excluded. In Kachin State, elections were conducted in 12 out of 18 townships, yet 207 wards—43.31 percent—were excluded. In Kayin State, 267 village tracts and wards, representing 57.67 percent, were excluded. In Mon State, 140 village tracts and wards (28.87 percent of wards and village tracts) were excluded.

[4] "2025 Election Coverage and Data from Myanmar," *The Irrawaddy* (Burmese), December 27, 2025, https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2025/12/27/409429.html; *Democratic Voice of Burma (Burmese)*, "2025 Election Results," https://burmese.dvb.no/2025-election; Data for Myanmar, Facebook page/posts, https://www.facebook.com/data4myanmar

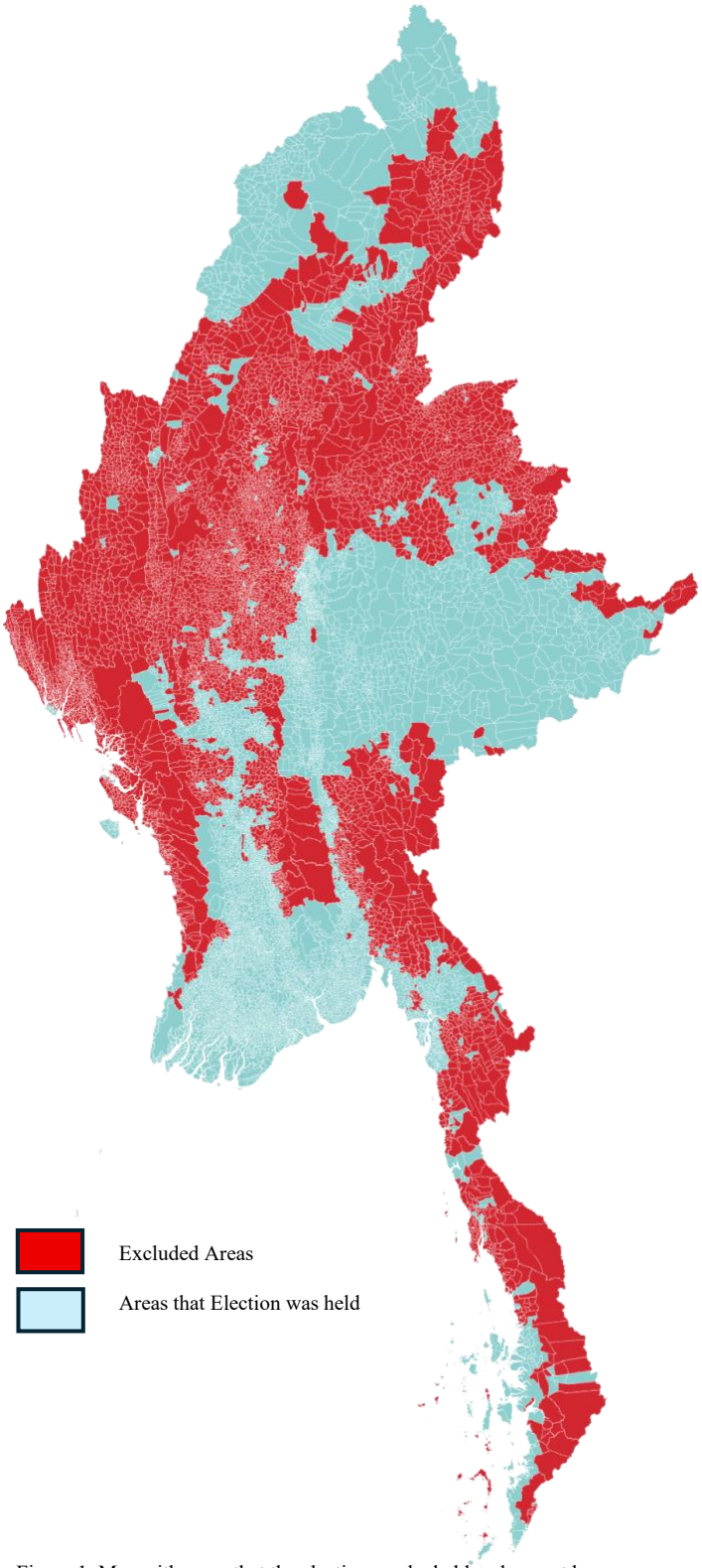

Figure 1. Map with areas that the election can be held and cannot be held (Source: DVB)

Overall, across ethnic states, 47 townships did not hold elections at all. Among the townships where polling occurred, 1,185 wards and village tracts were excluded. These figures demonstrate that the election was geographically selective and heavily concentrated in administratively controlled pockets rather than broadly representative of entire states. Township-level inclusion often masked deep intra-township exclusion, meaning that even where elections were technically "held," substantial portions of the population were unable to participate.

Exclusion in Sagaing, Magway, and Tanintharyi[5]

The pattern of exclusion extended beyond ethnic states into conflict-affected Bamar-majority regions. In Sagaing Region, 12 out of 37 townships could not hold elections. Among the remaining 25 townships, 70.91 percent of wards and village tracts were excluded. This indicates that even within participating townships, the overwhelming majority of communities were unable to vote. The election in Sagaing therefore operated in narrow administrative enclaves rather than across full township territories.

In Magway Region, 5 out of 25 townships could not hold elections. Among the 20 townships where polling was conducted, 50.81 percent of wards were excluded. In Tanintharyi Region, 3 out of 10 townships could not hold elections, and among the remaining 7

[5] "2025 Election Coverage and Data from Myanmar," *The Irrawaddy* (Burmese), December 27, 2025, https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2025/12/27/409429.html; *Democratic Voice of Burma (Burmese)*, "2025 Election Results," https://burmese.dvb.no/2025-election; Data for Myanmar, Facebook page/posts, https://www.facebook.com/data4myanmar

townships, 50.28 percent of wards and village tracts were excluded.

These figures demonstrate that the election was not territorially comprehensive even in central regions. The pattern across Sagaing, Magway, and Tanintharyi shows consistent fragmentation: township-level inclusion combined with high intra-township exclusion. In practical terms, the election footprint was confined to limited urban centers and administratively secure zones, while large rural and conflict-affected areas were effectively absent from the process.

Hence, polling were held only in 67 townships, 216 wards, and 3,682 village tracts across 263 townships.[6] While electoral cancellations in conflict-affected areas are not unprecedented, the scale of exclusion in 2025 was substantially greater than in the 2020 general election, when voting was postponed in 15 townships, 18 wards, and 589 village tracts due to security concerns.[7] In addition to these structural exclusions, authorities announced last-minute cancellations on 21 January 2026—three days before the scheduled polling date—affecting Mansi and Momauk townships. The magnitude of territorial limitations and the timing of these decisions narrowed the effective electoral map prior to polling day and reduced the number of constituencies in which voters could participate.

Taken together, the data reveals a structurally fragmented electoral landscape. Entire townships were excluded in both ethnic states and central conflict regions. Even within townships where elections were conducted, substantial proportions of wards and village tracts were unable to hold polling. This dual-layered exclusion—complete exclusion and significantly partial exclusion—combined with the 35 percent reduction in the national voter roll, significantly narrowed political participation. The 2025 election therefore functioned less as a nationwide democratic exercise and more as a territorially selective administrative process. Its geographic concentration mirrored the limits of effective state control, producing an electoral map defined as much by exclusion as by participation

Resistance Opposition, Territorial Control, and the Pre-Election Context

In the pre-election period, strong and coordinated opposition from resistance groups significantly shaped the political environment. By late 2025, multiple ethnic armed organizations and resistance coalitions had consolidated territorial control across large parts of the country and exercised substantial political and administrative influence in their respective areas. Their rejection of the junta-organised election was not merely rhetorical but grounded in their effective control of territory where the election could not feasibly be conducted.

In terms of territorial control nationwide, the Myanmar military maintained strong and full control in only 257 out of 350 townships—approximately 52 percent of the country. Meanwhile, 91 towns had been captured by resistance forces since the 2021 coup. These figures illustrate the junta's limited territorial reach and administrative capacity to conduct a nationwide election. While formal control over half of the country's townships may appear numerically significant, the loss of dozens

[6] "2025 Election Coverage and Data from Myanmar," *The Irrawaddy* (Burmese), December 27, 2025, https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2025/12/27/409429.html; *Democratic Voice of Burma (Burmese)*, "2025 Election Results," https://burmese.dvb.no/2025-election; Data for Myanmar, Facebook page/posts, https://www.facebook.com/data4myanmar

[7] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), *"2020 General Election in Myanmar: Fact Sheet,"* July 14, 2020, PDF file, https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/news/news-pdfs/2020-General-Election-in-Myanmar-Fact-Sheet_14-July-2020.pdf

of towns and the fragmentation of authority across contested areas reveal substantial constraints on the regime's ability to ensure uniform electoral implementation.

On 25 September 2025, ten members of the Multi-Ethnic Council (MEC), together with Sagaing Federal Unit Revolutionary Forces and Organization of Mandalay Political Platform , released a joint statement rejecting the junta-orchestrated election and calling on the international community to refuse recognition of the process. The statement reflected a unified position among key ethnic resistance actors who collectively controlled or strongly influenced extensive areas.[8]The MEC members included the Karenni Nationalities Progressive Party, Karenni State Consultative Council, Chin National Front (CNF), Karen National Union (KNU), Ta'ang Land Council (TLC), Mon State Federal Council (MSFC), New Mon State Party (AD), Pa-O National Federal Council Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), and the Women's League of Burma.

On the same date, 25 September, the Chin Brotherhood separately announced that it would oppose the junta-organised election scheduled for 28 December, stating that the process had been illegally created without the will of the people. The statement explicitly prohibited any attempt to conduct junta-sponsored elections in areas controlled by the alliance of Chin ethnic armed groups.[9] In Chin State, the Chin National Front/Chinland Council and the Chin Brotherhood collectively controlled more than 80 percent of towns. The Myanmar military retained control primarily over Hakha, Tedim, and Khaikam sub-town. As a result, the junta could only realistically conduct the election in those limited areas under its authority. Across the majority of Chin State, resistance groups opposed the election and effectively prevented its implementation. On 7 December 2026, the Ta'ang Land Council, chaired by the leader of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, publicly urged the population to oppose the election. [10]The Ta'ang National Liberation Army controlled at least seven towns in Northern Shan State, and elections could not be conducted in these controlled territories.

Similarly, the Kachin Independence Army, which controlled at least six towns and exerted strong influence across much of Kachin State—including Bhamo, Hpakant, Waingmaw, and areas surrounding Myitkyina—opposed what it described as a sham election. The Arakan Army, which controlled 14 of 17 townships in Rakhine State, also declared that it would not allow voting in its territories. [11]These developments demonstrate that major ethnic resistance groups adopted a firm and coordinated stance rejecting the election. Their opposition was reinforced by effective territorial control, limiting the junta's administrative reach in large portions of ethnic states. In

[8] Karen National Union (Facebook page), Facebook post, September 30, 2025, "အာဏာသိမ်းအကြမ်းဖက်စစ်တပ်၏ တရားမဝင်အတုအယောင် ရွေးကောက်ပွဲအပေါ် တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးများကောင်စီ (Multi Ethnic Councils – MEC) နှင့် ဖက်ဒရယ်ယူနစ်အဖွဲ့အစည်းများ၏ သဘောထားထုတ်ပြန်ကြေညာချက်," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/KNUHQKTL/posts/pfbid0yMRqyg6mkqF6WBwjt4o6n8AeNsgZjBZ2EsXqQNpiFDdZNRuGLaJcGeiMfio9qGnLl?mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=yvDrKYHPvsPi4KVW#

[9] "Chin Brotherhood Vows to Block Myanmar Junta's Planned Election," *Mizzima* (English), September 29, 2025, https://eng.mizzima.com/2025/09/29/26780

[10] Ta'ang Land Council (Facebook page), Facebook post, December 7, 2025, "(၂၇၁၇) ပြည့်နှစ် တအာင်းနှစ်သစ်ကူးမင်္ဂလာကြိုဆို ဂုဏ်ပြုလွှာ," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0aXt1aTzNvW7Q9PGKoGR5mXZcHWMGKXZqtF5uRnjf8PzMGhgFdmeovDNWfWwqVaU6l&id=100072494673782

[11] "Ethnic Armies Vow to Thwart Myanmar Junta's Election," *The Irrawaddy*, August 15, 2025, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/ethnic-armies-vow-to-thwart-myanmar-juntas-election.html

many of these areas, the inability to conduct voting was not due to logistical challenges alone but resulted directly from the political and military realities on the ground.

Beyond territorial control, public mobilisation further underscored widespread resistance. Since September 2024, more than 129 in-person anti–sham election protest events were recorded nationwide. Sagaing Region recorded the highest number, with at least 99 protest events, followed by Kachin State, Karen State, and Tanintharyi Region.[12] Therefore, the limited territorial control of the Myanmar military—controlling only around half of the country's townships—combined with the capture of 91 towns by resistance forces, [13]the coordinated rejection by major ethnic armed organizations, and sustained public protest activity, demonstrates that the pre-election context was defined by fragmentation of authority and widespread opposition. Both predominantly Bamar-majority regions and non-Bamar ethnic states exhibited strong resistance to the junta-orchestrated election, shaping a political environment in which nationwide electoral implementation faced structural and legitimacy constraints.

Uncontested Seats and Automatic Victories

Junta orchasted election was further constrained by the presence of uncontested constituencies. A total of 31 constituencies nationwide had only one registered candidate. Under the election law, if only one candidate stands in a constituency, polling does not take place and the candidate is automatically declared elected. Of these 31 constituencies, 28 were won by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), while one uncontested seat each was secured by the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, the Wa National Party, and the Akha National Development Party. As a result, nearly 30 seats were effectively determined prior to election day. Although consistent with the legal framework, the prevalence of uncontested constituencies limited voter choice and reduced the degree of direct electoral competition.

Party Registration Framework and Structural Advantages[14]

The Political Parties Registration Law established stringent conditions for party registration and continued recognition. Article 3(f) required that a party intending to operate nationwide mobilize at least 100,000 members within 90 days of registration. Parties operating only at the state or regional level were required to mobilize at least 1,000 members within the same timeframe. Article 3(h) required nationwide parties to open offices in at least half of all townships within 180 days of registration, while state or regional parties were required to establish at least five offices within that period.

These provisions created high organizational and financial thresholds. The USDP, which was formed from the former Union Solidarity and Development Association—a state-sponsored mass organization established in 1993—already possessed extensive membership networks and offices

[12] ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project), *ACLED Data for Myanmar,* accessed [February 28, 2026], https://www.acleddata.com.

[13] Myanmar Peace Monitor (MPM), "တော်လှန်ရေးတပ်ဖွဲ့များ သိမ်းပိုက်ထိန်းချုပ်ထားသည့် မြို့များ," February 22, 2026, https://mmpeacemonitor.org/my/mmr-ongoing-dashboard/; COAR Global, *Actors and Control Tracker*, accessed February 26, 2026, https://coar-global.org/actors-and-control-tracker

[14] "Political Parties Registration Law," *Ministry of Information (Republic of the Union of Myanmar)*, State Administration Council Law No. 15/2023, January 26, 2023, https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/laws/9320.

across the country. Similarly, the National Unity Party (NUP), as successor to the Burma Socialist Programme Party, maintained nationwide structures due to its historical affiliation with previous regimes, despite limited electoral success in 2015 and 2020.

In contrast, several parties were dissolved for failing to meet membership and office requirements. These included the National Democratic Force (NDF), the Democratic Party of National Politics (DNP), the Women's Party (Mon), and the Union Farmers and Workers Force Party. The enforcement of these provisions reduced the number of legally registered competitors before the campaign period began[15]. Only a limited number of parties were recognized as Union-level parties in 2025, including the USDP (led by ex-junta cabinet minister and ex-military officer U Khin Yi), the People's Pioneer Party (PPP) led by Dr. Thet Thet Khine (ex-junta cabinet minister, the People's Party (PP), the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), the Myanmar Farmers Development Party (MFDP, and the National Unity Party (NUP). This represented a narrower field compared to previous elections.

Article 12(a)(i) required nationwide parties to contest at least half of the constituencies at the Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw, and Regional or State Hluttaw levels, including ethnic affairs constituencies, in order to retain party status. Failure to meet this threshold would result in loss of legal recognition. In a context of widespread territorial exclusions and resource constraints, this requirement placed significant operational pressure on parties without nationwide infrastructure. Article 12(a)(v) prohibited direct or indirect contact with organizations designated as insurgent groups, terrorist organizations, or unlawful associations. Given the ongoing armed conflict and the designation of numerous resistance organizations under these categories, this clause limited political engagement in contested areas and created legal risks for parties operating in regions outside full state control.

Article 19(a) further provided that, if a party dissolved voluntarily or had its registration cancelled, its property would be transferred to a government-designated department or organization. This provision introduced material consequences for deregistration and raised the stakes associated with compliance under restrictive conditions.[16]

Institutional Alignment and Candidate Deployment

The pre-election environment was also shaped by the relationship between the military regime and the USDP. Approximately 489 personnel were transferred from the Ministry of Defense to the USDP prior to the election. This group reportedly included one General, six Lieutenant Generals, 12 Major Generals, approximately 300 mid-ranking officers (including Brigadier Generals, Colonels, and Lieutenant Colonels), 110 Captains and Majors, and 60 additional administrative personnel.[17]

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[15] CNI News, "Four Parties Including NDF Whose Candidate Daw Sandar Min Dissolved by UEC," *CNI Myanmar*, September 11, 2025, https://cnimyanmar.com/index.php/english-edition/31450-four-parties-including-ndf-whose-candidate-daw-sandar-min-dissolved-by-uec

[16] "Political Parties Registration Law," *Ministry of Information (Republic of the Union of Myanmar)*, State Administration Council Law No. 15/2023, January 26, 2023, https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/laws/9320

[17] "ပြည်ခိုင်ဖြိုးပါတီသို့ အကြမ်းဖက်စစ်တပ်က ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ကြီးအဆင့်မှ အောက်ခြေအဆင့်ထိ အမတ်လောင်း ၅၀၀ ခန့်၏စာရင်းပေးပို့," *Burmese Narinjara*, September 17, 2025, https://burmese.narinjara.com/local-news/detail/68ca4d448e07c5a80b00a5c4

Numerous high-profile military and former military figures contested seats under the USDP banner at Union and regional levels. These included senior officials such as Aung Lin Dwe, Mya Tun Oo, and Minister Tin Aung San, as well as several retired Lieutenant Generals. Candidates were deployed across strategically significant constituencies. In Naypyidaw, USDP Chairman and former Union Minister Khin Yi contested in Zayyar Thiri, while National Security Advisor Tin Aung San ran in Ottara Thiri. Other senior figures, including former generals and cabinet members, were fielded in key townships such as Pyin Oo Lwin, Sagaing, Magway, Maubin, and Pauk Khaung. The participation of serving officials, recently transferred officers, and sitting cabinet members indicated a close institutional linkage between the military administration and the party's electoral strategy.

Non-Participation of Established Political Parties

The competitive landscape of the 2025 general election was significantly reshaped prior to polling by the dissolution and non-participation of historically significant political parties, including several that had previously achieved substantial electoral victories. On 28 March 2023, the junta's election commission dissolved 40 political parties for failing to meet the new registration requirements under the revised Political Parties Registration Law. [18]Many of these parties chose not to register under the conditions imposed by the regime, effectively refusing to participate in an electoral framework they did not recognize.

Among the dissolved parties were major national and ethnic actors that had previously secured significant electoral wins and parliamentary representation at both Union and state/regional levels. These included the National League for Democracy (NLD), the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), the Arakan National Party, Kayah State Democratic Party (KySDP), the Kayin National Party, the Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party, the Lahu National Development Party, the Arakan League for Democracy Party, the Zomi Congress for Democracy, the Chin National League for Democracy Party, as well as other prominent ethnic political parties such as the Union Pa-O National Organization, the Lhaovo National Unity and Development Party, and the Daingnet National Development Party.

Several of these parties had not only participated in previous elections but had also won seats and formed an integral part of ethnic political representation in their respective states. Their dissolution therefore did not merely reduce the number of registered parties; it removed established political actors with demonstrated electoral mandates and longstanding constituencies. The NLD, which secured approximately 83 percent of elected Union-level seats in 2020 and achieved a dominant parliamentary majority in 2015, did not register for the 2025 election. Its absence is particularly significant given its nationwide electoral mandate in the two preceding general elections. Among its 21 Central Executive Committee members, seven—including the party leader and vice chair—were imprisoned. Approximately 140 elected NLD members of parliament and 2,836 party members remained detained at the time of the election cycle. Party offices were reportedly sealed or destroyed on at least 167 occasions, and according to party findings, at least 971 buildings belonging to 849 party members, including elected representatives, were confiscated. Under these

[18] Global New Light of Myanmar, *GNLM*, March 29, 2023, PDF file, https://cdn.digitalagencybangkok.com/file/client-cdn/gnlm/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/29_March_23_gnlm.pdf

conditions—marked by detention of leadership, dismantling of party infrastructure, and seizure of property—the party did not participate in the electoral process.

Other ethnic and regional parties that had previously secured representation and electoral wins also did not contest. The SNLD, which won 23 seats in 1990, 40 seats in 2015, and 42 seats in 2020, did not participate. The Ta'ang National Party, which won 12 seats in 2020, did not contest. The Kayah State Democratic Party, which secured eight seats in 2020, and the Kayan National Party, which won an ethnic affairs minister position in 2020, also did not participate in the election. And the Arakan National Party which won 22 Union Hluttaw seats and 22 Rakhine Hluttaw seats, and an ethnic affairs ministership, in 2015 election and 15 seats in the 2020 election, was not allowed to register and contest in junta orchastrated election. The Arakan League for Democracy, the third largest winning party in the 1990 election, which also had six MPs in the 2015 Hluttaw, did not register and contest. The Chin National League for Democracy and the Lahu National Development Party, both of which had previously won seats, did not join the election. The Zomi Congress for Democracy, which won six seats in 2015 and two seats in 2020, likewise did not contest. The cumulative absence of these parties—including multiple actors that had achieved measurable electoral success in previous cycles—substantially altered the structure of political competition in 2025. Their dissolution and non-registration narrowed the spectrum of nationally and ethnically representative parties on the ballot and reduced the continuity between prior electoral mandates and the 2025 electoral framework.[19]

Therefore, the extensive territorial exclusions, the legal and organizational thresholds imposed by the party registration framework, mandatory contestation requirements, restrictions on political association, provisions concerning party dissolution and asset transfer, the high number of uncontested constituencies, the integration of serving and former military officials into party structures, and the absence of previously dominant national and ethnic parties collectively shaped a pre-election environment with limited pluralism and restricted electoral competitiveness. These structural conditions significantly influenced the character of the electoral process before voting commenced.

Legal Repression and the "Election Protection" Law

Another defining feature of the pre-election period was the introduction and enforcement of new legal measures aimed at suppressing opposition to the junta-organised election. In July 2025, the military authorities enacted the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections

[19] Union Election Commission, *အမျိုးသားလွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ်လောင်း တစ်ဦးချင်း၏ ဆန္ဒမဲရရှိမှုအခြေအနေ (၂၀၂၀ ပြည့်နှစ် အထွေထွေရွေးကောက်ပွဲ)* [Vote share of individual candidates for the Amyotha Hluttaw (2020 General Election)] (PDF, in Burmese), archived February 1, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20210201042320/https://uecdata.s3.ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/2020%20Election%20Result%20%28%20Percentage%20%29/2.%20Amyotha%20Result%20%28%20Percentage%20%29/Amyotha%20Each%20Candidate%20Result.pdf; Union Election Commission, *ပြည်သူ့လွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ်လောင်း တစ်ဦးချင်းစီ၏ ဆန္ဒမဲရရှိမှုအခြေအနေ (၂၀၂၀ ပြည့်နှစ် အထွေထွေရွေးကောက်ပွဲ)* [Vote share of individual candidates for the Pyithu Hluttaw (2020 General Election)] (PDF, in Burmese), archived February 1, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20210201042254/https://uecdata.s3.ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/2020%20Election%20Result%20%28%20Percentage%20%29/1.%20Pyithu%20Result%20%28%20Percentage%20%29/Pyithu%20Each%20Candidate%20Result.pdf; and The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2020 General Election: State and Region Hluttaws* (December 2020), https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Myanmar_2020-General-Election-State-and-Region-Hluttaws.pdf

from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction. The law was explicitly framed as a mechanism to prevent interference with the electoral process, but in practice, it functioned as a broad instrument to target anyone opposing the regime's orchestrated election. The law criminalizes criticism, public statements, organizing activities, and protests that could be interpreted as obstructing or disrupting the electoral process. Its provisions are expansive and vaguely defined, allowing authorities wide discretion in determining what constitutes "disruption." Violations carry severe penalties, including prison sentences of up to 20 years and, in some cases, the death penalty.[20]

The enactment of this law indicates that the military authorities anticipated significant public resistance to the election. Rather than relying solely on administrative preparations or political outreach, the regime institutionalized legal coercion as a central strategy for managing dissent. The scope and severity of the penalties demonstrate an effort not only to deter active resistance but also to suppress speech and civic mobilisation more broadly.

As of 31 January 2026, 404 individuals had been charged under election-related provisions, and 84 people had been arrested. These figures illustrate the early and systematic use of legal mechanisms to constrain opposition during the pre-election period.

Taken together, the adoption of the election protection law and the subsequent arrests underscore that the pre-election environment was shaped not only by territorial fragmentation and organized resistance but also by formalized legal repression. The reliance on punitive legislation further reflects the regime's awareness of widespread public opposition and its decision to address that opposition through coercive rather than participatory means.

[20] "Myanmar 2025 Election Human Rights Violations and Cases," *Democratic Voice of Burma (English)*, accessed February 26, 2026, https://english.dvb.no/hrv-election-cases/; Fortify Rights, *Investigation Report: 2025 Myanmar General Election Human Rights Violations*, December 10, 2025, https://www.fortifyrights.org/mya-inv-2025-12-10

Electoral Participation Patterns: Advance Voting and Turnout Disparities

During the election period, advance ballots emerged as one of the most decisive factors shaping the electoral outcome, particularly benefiting the Myanmar military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and its candidates. Advance voting played a structurally significant role in enabling the USDP to secure electoral victories across multiple constituencies. Across all three election phases, the USDP received more than 40 percent of its total votes from advance ballots in 11 out of 71 towns, demonstrating the substantial weight of administratively controlled voting blocs. In several constituencies, the proportion of advance votes was large enough to influence or overturn the results that would otherwise have emerged from polling-day ballots alone. This pattern suggests that advance voting functioned not merely as a supplementary mechanism for absentee voters but as a critical institutional channel through which the military-aligned party consolidated its electoral advantage.

Phase 1: Advance Vote Concentration

USDP Advance Vote %	**Number of Townships**	**% of Total Townships**	**Name of Townships**
40% and above	5	15.6%	Thandaunggyi (83%), Bawlakhe (79%), Hakha (52%), Kyaukphyu (48%), Kyaikmaraw (40%)
30% – 39%	4	12.5%	Myawaddy (36%), Sittwe (34%), Tanai (33%), Tedim (33%)
20% – 29%	8	25.0%	Hopong (29%), Loilen (27%), Kengtung (25%), Langkho (24%), Mohnyin (23%), Loikaw (23%), Lashio (23%), Hpa-An (22%)

Notably, in Thandaunggyi (Karen State), 1,661 of 2,001 valid votes (83 percent) were advance votes. In Bawlakhe (Karenni State), 1,236 of 1,569 votes (79 percent) were advance votes. In Hakha (Chin State), 1,040 of 2,007 votes (52 percent) were advance votes. In Kyaukphyu (Rakhine State), 3,024 of 6,355 votes (48 percent) were advance votes for the USDP.

Phase 2: Advance Vote Concentration

USDP Advance Vote %	**Number of Townships**	**% of Total Townships**	**Name of Townships**
40% and above	3	10.3%	Hpruso (74.56%), Demoso (54.88%), Ye (45.65%)
30% – 39.9%	2	6.9%	Hpapun (34.97%), Mongpan (32.55%)
20% – 29.9%	8	27.6%	Tangyan (27.83%), Mongyang (27.57%), Monghpyak (24.53%), Laihka (23.57%), Mudon (22.44%), Thanbyuzayat (21.24%), Machanbaw (21.01%), Mongyai (20.35%)

In Hpruso (Karenni State), 724 out of 971 votes (74.56 percent) were advance votes, while in Demoso, 781 out of 1,423 votes (54.88 percent) were advance votes. Ye (Mon State) recorded 2,978 advance votes out of 6,524 total votes (45.65 percent).

Phase 3: Advance Vote Concentration

Advance Vote % Bracket	Number of Townships	% of Phase 3 (N=29)	Name of Townships
40% and above	3	30%	Bhamo (95.97%), Kyainseikgyi (58.04%), Kawkareik (44.87%)
30% – 39.9%	1	10%	Hpakant (37.09%)
20% – 29.9%	1	10%	Pinlaung (22.70%)

In Bhamo, 4,764 of 4,964 votes (95.97 percent) were advance votes. In Kyainseikgyi, 2,007 of 3,458 votes (58.04 percent) were advance votes. Across all three phases, the USDP-backed party received more than 40 percent of its votes from advance ballots in 11 out of 71 towns, demonstrating the structural weight of administratively controlled voting blocs. Where civilian populations were displaced, excluded, or resistant, the relative proportion of military and civil service votes increased significantly, amplifying the influence of voters directly linked to the regime.

In many of these areas, advance voting procedures were conducted with limited independent oversight and minimal transparency, raising concerns about unsupervised advance voting processes. Reports from contesting parties and observers indicated that the administration and collection of advance ballots often occurred without the presence of representatives from non-USDP parties. As a result, the integrity, monitoring, and verification of advance ballots remained highly questionable, reinforcing broader concerns about the credibility and competitiveness of the electoral process.

The reliance on advance votes was particularly consequential given the absence of the largest winning party from previous elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD), as well as other top electoral performers such as the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and the Arakan National Party (ANP). Without the participation of these major competitors, the USDP's pathway to majority status was heavily dependent on advance ballots largely cast by civil servants, military personnel, and police forces—groups operating under the authority and influence of the regime. In displacement-affected and resistance-controlled areas, where civilian participation was low or suppressed, the proportional impact of these advance votes increased substantially. Where local populations were displaced, excluded, or actively resistant, the relative share of military and civil service votes became decisive in determining outcomes. This structural imbalance amplified the influence of voters directly linked to the regime and narrowed the representativeness of electoral results.

Low Voter Turnout and Limited Participation in Ethnic States

The 2025 election recorded approximately 54 percent nationwide turnout, making it the lowest turnout since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1990. Historical turnout figures illustrate this decline clearly: 72.6 percent in 1990, 77.26 percent in 2010, 69.82 percent in 2015, 71.89

percent in 2020, and 54 percent in 2025. Compared with previous electoral cycles, the 2025 turnout represents a substantial drop of nearly 18 percentage points from 2020 and more than 15 percentage points from 2015. This sharp decline occurred in the context of territorial exclusion, widespread displacement, the boycott and dissolution of major political parties, and active resistance opposition to the electoral process. The significantly lower participation rate, particularly when contrasted with the relatively high engagement levels of 2015 and 2020, underscores reduced public confidence and the limited inclusiveness of the 2025 election.

Voter Turn out by Year

Election Year	Voter Turnout (%)
1990	72.6%
2010	77.26%
2015	69.82%
2020	71.89%
2025	54%

Reduced participation was not limited to voters but extended to political parties. Only 57 parties participated in the 2025 election, compared with 93 parties in 2020, 73 parties in 2015, 93 parties in 1990, and 37 parties in 2010. Excluding the highly restricted 2010 election, the 2025 poll recorded the lowest number of participating political parties since 1990. The decline from 93 parties in 2020 to 57 in 2025 reflects the cumulative effects of party dissolutions, boycotts, restrictive registration requirements, and sustained political repression. Together, the contraction in both voter turnout and party participation signals a narrowing of electoral competition and civic engagement relative to previous multiparty elections.

Low turnout across non-Bamar ethnic areas further shaped the electoral outcome and limited the representativeness of results. In Chin State, Hakha had 27,475 eligible voters, yet only 2,836 ballots were cast (10.32 percent). Tedim recorded 4,235 voters (31.91 percent). Statewide turnout in Chin was approximately 22 percent. In Rakhine State, Kyaukphyu recorded 13,025 voters out of 47,848 (27.22 percent). Sittwe recorded 39,884 out of 92,430 (43.15 percent), while Manaung recorded 32,755 out of 55,561 (58.95 percent). Statewide turnout was approximately 32 percent.

In Karenni State, Bawlakhe recorded 1,751 voters out of 8,100 (21.62 percent). In Hpruso, only 1,051 out of 19,953 eligible voters cast ballots (5.27 percent). In Demoso, only 2,034 people voted. In Kachin State, Tanai recorded 15,073 voters out of 33,177 (45.43 percent), Khaunglanhpu 4,669 out of 8,909 (52.41 percent), and Putao 22,144 out of 41,164 (53.79 percent). However, Hpakant recorded only 1,961 voters, and Bhamo recorded only 439 in-person voters despite extremely high advance vote totals. In Karen State, Thandaunggyi recorded 2,512 voters out of 60,000 eligible voters (4.19 percent). Kawkareik recorded 3,656 out of 39,038 (9.37 percent), and Kyainseikgyi recorded 2,083 out of 10,135 (20.55 percent).

Statewide Turnout Comparisons

State / Region	Voter Turnout (%)
Chin State	22%
Rakhine State	32%
Karenni State	Among the lowest

Kachin State	Approximately 36%
Karen State	Approximately 32%
Mon State	Around 40%
Shan State	Around 60%
Sagaing Region	31.7%

Taken together, the combination of extensive territorial exclusion, extremely low voter turnout in multiple ethnic states, and the decisive role of advance voting—particularly among civil servants and military personnel—raises significant questions regarding the representativeness and legitimacy of the electoral outcome. In areas where large portions of territory were excluded or controlled by resistance forces, and where participation rates fell to minimal levels, the resulting parliamentary representation cannot reasonably be interpreted as reflecting broad-based public consent.

Realities from Ethnic Areas

As discussed in previous sections, the majority of ethnic areas were effectively excluded from meaningful participation in the 2025 electoral process. In many regions, voting rights were denied in practice through territorial exclusion, insecurity, administrative cancellation of polling, and the dissolution or deregistration of political parties. Regardless of whether communities wished to participate, their rights to vote—and to be elected—were significantly curtailed by restrictive election laws and the disbanding of established parties.

Across interviews conducted in Shan, Rakhine, Sagaing, Karen, Karenni, and Chin areas, respondents consistently emphasized that this election witnessed the lowest level of public participation and political interest in their lifetimes. Many residents reported that they were unaware of the election date or had little understanding of the electoral process. In several communities, there were no visible campaign activities. Local ethnic parties were unable to organize meaningful campaigns due to security risks, restricted movement, and limited public engagement.

A respondent from Karenni State explained that public campaign activities were largely symbolic and primarily conducted by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Due to ongoing conflict and widespread displacement, other parties could not safely mobilize supporters. In multiple ethnic areas, respondents expressed surprise that the USDP won constituencies despite conducting minimal campaigning—sometimes limited to placing a few posters. A Shanni respondent, drawing from his experience in the education sector, noted that there was virtually no public outreach, yet the military-backed party secured victory.

Conflict intensity in Karenni, Chin, and Rakhine States has led to mass displacement, further depressing voter turnout. In many townships, a significant proportion of eligible voters were internally displaced and unable to access polling stations. Reports of coerced voting also emerged, particularly in Hakha and Tedim in Chin State, where government servants and residents in urban wards were reportedly pressured to cast ballots. Such coercion further undermined the credibility of the process.

Although some ethnic parties secured seats, respondents indicated that voters were often left choosing what they described as the "lesser evil," given the absence of major national opposition parties and the constraints placed on political competition. Several ethnic parties were widely perceived to maintain close ties with the military administration. For example, the Mon Unity Party (MUP), which emerged as the second-largest party in Mon State, and the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO), have longstanding institutional relationships with the military establishment, and some of their leadership figures have been involved in the State Administration Council's administrative structures.

In Shan State, respondents noted that the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) performed significantly worse than in previous cycles. The party won 57 seats in 2010 but secured only 39 seats in 2025, including 26 through proportional representation. This outcome suggested that the party did not dominate in many Shan townships as it had in the past. However, in Chin, Mon, Naga, and Karen areas, voting patterns reflected strong ethnic affiliation. Residents in these areas tended to support parties aligned with their ethnic identity rather than the military-backed USDP.

In Karen State, the Karen National Democratic Party, which had won no seats in the 2020 election, secured 7 seats in 2025, including three under the first-past-the-post system. This shift was widely interpreted by local respondents as a form of public rejection of the military-backed party and a strategic consolidation of support behind an ethnic alternative. The KNDP's gains, despite limited campaign space and security constraints, further illustrate how voters in ethnic areas used the limited political space available to express dissent.

In the Naga Self-Administered Area, the Naga National Party won constituencies despite having failed to secure any seats in the 2020 election. An election observer remarked that voters appeared to support parties they had not chosen in 2020, specifically to avoid backing the USDP—an indication of continued resistance to military rule. In Tedim Township, voters largely supported the Zomi National Party, reflecting strong ethnic affiliation. Turnout in Tedim was approximately 20 percent higher than in Hakha, reportedly due to stronger local identification with the ethnic party.

In Mon State, the MUP demonstrated a similar pattern of ethnic consolidation. The party won 5 out of 10 Pyithu Hluttaw seats and 5 out of 12 Amyotha Hluttaw seats contested in Mon State—matching the number secured by the USDP in the state. Nationwide, the MUP won 17 seats in 2025, compared to 12 seats in 2020, suggesting that voters in Mon areas preferred their ethnic party over the military-backed alternative.

The PNO continued its strong electoral performance in Pa-O areas, maintaining a pattern observed since 2010. In 2010, all 10 of its candidates won; in 2015, it secured 10 out of 11 contested seats; and in 2025, it again won 18 seats. Notably, a PNO candidate defeated Shan State Chief Minister Aung Aung (a former lieutenant general and commander of the Bureau of Special Operations No. 2), underscoring localized resistance to direct military figures.

In Mon State, the role of advance voting was particularly consequential. In one closely contested constituency, MUP candidate polling station results showed 20,031 votes, compared to 18,961 votes for Aung Kyi Thein, a former Chief Minister of Mon State. However, 2,170 advance votes

were added to Aung Kyi Thein's total, enabling him to win by a margin of 516 votes. Although the final outcome favored the military-aligned candidate, the polling station results reflected significant local rejection of the military-backed party. The decisive impact of last-minute advance ballots reinforced broader concerns regarding the weight of administratively controlled voting blocs in shaping outcomes.

Overall, patterns across ethnic areas reveal a complex dynamic: widespread exclusion, displacement, coercion, and administrative manipulation constrained participation, while in areas where voting occurred, ethnic identity remained a powerful determinant of electoral choice. Even under restrictive conditions, many communities demonstrated clear preferences for ethnic-affiliated parties over the military-backed USDP, signaling persistent resistance to centralized military rule despite structural limitations imposed on the electoral process.

Controversies and Lack of Transparency

During the election period, even contesting parties that are generally considered aligned with the junta publicly raised concerns regarding transparency. The People's Party, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), and the Myanmar Farmers Development Party submitted formal letters to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing requesting an investigation into what they described as serious irregularities and a lack of transparency in the advance voting process.[21] These parties specifically complained that advance voting procedures were dominated by members of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), while representatives from other parties were excluded from monitoring, collection, and verification processes. As documented in earlier sections, the USDP secured victories in numerous constituencies where advance votes constituted a decisive proportion of total ballots. The complaints from aligned parties, therefore, underscored that concerns about manipulation were not limited to opposition actors but also emerged from within the junta's broader political circle.

International observation was also highly limited. A small number of observers from Belarus, China, Indonesia, India, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Nepal, Russia, Kazakhstan, and representatives from the International Conference of Asian Political Parties reportedly observed parts of Phase 1 and Phase 3 of the election. However, their observation missions were confined largely to urban areas in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw. Unlike the 2015 and 2020 elections, there were no nationwide observer deployments and no meaningful monitoring presence in conflict-affected or ethnic areas. This absence of comprehensive observation reinforced perceptions that monitoring efforts were largely symbolic rather than substantive.

While representatives from China and Russia described the election as successfully completed, international democratic institutions and regional actors expressed a sharply different assessment. On February 6, International IDEA released a statement noting that the junta-organized elections did not meet the minimum conditions for free, fair, or inclusive elections. It stated that the process

[21] **BBC News Burmese (Facebook page),** Facebook post, January 3, 2026, "ကြိုတင်မဲကိစ္စ ပါတီခေါင်းဆောင်တချို့ စစ်ခေါင်းဆောင်ဆီစာပို့," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/BBCnewsBurmese/posts/pfbid0286ej4wRnNmYGpCp5RzPzpcgwTD3Qs2JVpaMBvA2zkTvmEbfm1jqF3qs6M32yE5qal

appeared designed to manufacture a veneer of civilian legitimacy for continued military rule rather than to represent the will of Myanmar's people.[22]

International IDEA's position aligned with that of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, the European Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), all of which declined to endorse or recognize the junta-run elections. The refusal of ASEAN to recognize the elections reflected a growing regional and international consensus that the process lacked credibility and should not be legitimized.

An election monitoring respondent who had previously observed elections in Myanmar stated that the junta-orchestrated process was "very far away from free and fair" and was simply manipulated to ensure continuity of military rule under a different institutional label. According to this respondent, the election was primarily intended to mislead the international community rather than to facilitate genuine democratic transition.

"Wait and See" Approach and Low Expectations

According to respondents from ethnic areas, there are extremely low expectations for the post-election government. Communities expressed doubts that elected Members of Parliament (MPs) would be able to raise political questions freely within the Hluttaw. Respondents from Shan and Chin States remarked that if MPs were able to ask substantive political questions, it would come as a surprise. They anticipated that parliamentary discussions would focus narrowly on development issues, avoiding politically sensitive matters.

Many respondents believed that the Hluttaw would not function as a genuinely independent legislative body. Instead, MPs would likely operate in a climate of fear—concerned about raising the "wrong" questions or submitting proposals deemed unacceptable. Even though 29 ethnic-affiliated political parties contested the election and 23 of them secured seats, respondents emphasized that voter participation was often motivated by the absence of alternatives rather than optimism. Ethnic-affiliated parties collectively won 155 seats in ethnic areas, yet community members consistently stated that they did not expect peace, stability, or meaningful development to follow.

Voting, for many, was described as an act of ethnic loyalty rather than confidence in governance outcomes. In some areas, limited campaign activities further weakened engagement. Many voters were unfamiliar with newly introduced voting machines and lacked adequate voter education. A respondent from the Shanni region noted that while Shanni-affiliated parties won seats, expectations remained minimal. The prevailing sentiment was to "wait and see," recognizing that ethnic parties might better understand local needs but doubting their capacity to effect systemic change under military dominance.

[22] **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA),** "*International IDEA Statement: Marking Five Years Since Myanmar's Military Coup*," *International IDEA*, February 4, 2026, https://www.idea.int/news/international-idea-statement-marking-five-years-myanmars-military-coup

Military Rule Continuity and Government Formation

Possibilities for continued military dominance remain high. In a BBC interview, USDP Central Executive Committee member and Nay Pyi Taw Council's USDP Chair Hla Swe confirmed the likelihood that chief ministers would be appointed in contested areas, implicitly referring to ethnic states.[23] Mon State appears particularly significant. It is reportedly the only state/region whose military-appointed Members of the Mon State Hluttaw include officers with ranks as high as Brigadier General, notably Brigadier General Aung Win Than. In other states and regions, the highest-ranking military-appointed MPs generally hold the rank of Colonel. This increases the likelihood that Brigadier General Aung Win Than could be appointed Chief Minister.

Under existing constitutional provisions, eligibility for Chief Minister includes being a Member of Parliament, including military-appointed MPs. This structure ensures that the military retains decisive influence over executive appointments regardless of electoral outcomes. Indeed, several incumbent chief ministers who had been appointed under military rule contested and won seats under the USDP banner, positioning themselves to continue in office.

For example:

- In Kachin State, junta's Chief Minister U Khat Htein Nan won a regional seat.
- In Mon State, junta's Chief Minister Aung Kyi Thein won a Hluttaw seat.
- In Karenni State, Poe Reh Aung Thein—former State Administration Council member and current advisory team member of the National Defense and Security Council—won a state seat.
- In Chin State, junta's Chief Minister Dr. Von Sung Thang secured a Hluttaw seat.
- In Karen State, junta's Chief Minister U Saw Myint Oo contested and won.

All ran under the USDP. Only in Shan State did the incumbent Chief Minister lose to an ethnic party candidate. Despite the USDP's electoral victories, reports indicate that Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing remained deeply involved in cabinet selection and chief minister appointments even as the parliament's convening approached. It is widely speculated that Min Aung Hlaing may assume the presidency or chair a newly formed Union Consultative Council overseeing the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Many senior junta officials and military figures who contested and won seats are expected to transition directly into positions within the newly formed government, claiming electoral legitimacy. According to Hla Swe's BBC interview, the cabinet will largely be composed of elected MPs, many of whom are already serving union ministers or senior military officials. This suggests that the new administration will consist largely of the same individuals operating under a rebranded institutional framework.Communities in ethnic areas therefore anticipate little substantive change. The continuity of personnel reinforces perceptions that the election was a mechanism to formalize and extend military rule rather than to initiate political reform.

[23] **BBC Burmese (Facebook page),** Facebook video post, March 1, 2026, "Interview with U Hla Swe," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1BvWW9ckcH/?mibextid=wwXlfr

Legitimacy Deficit of the Newly Formed Government

The government formed through the junta-orchestrated three-phase election faces a profound legitimacy deficit. In Chin State, elected MPs effectively represent only a small number of townships, while in Rakhine State representation is similarly limited to a handful of towns. Large portions of territory were excluded from polling due to conflict or administrative restrictions. The combination of territorial exclusion, low voter turnout, displacement, limited party competition, coercive practices, and controversial advance voting procedures significantly undermines claims to democratic legitimacy. While procedural legitimacy is typically derived from electoral processes, the narrow scope, restrictive conditions, and lack of inclusiveness surrounding this election severely constrain its credibility. Consequently, both domestically and internationally, the newly formed government is widely perceived as lacking a genuine popular mandate. Rather than reflecting the will of Myanmar's diverse population, the process appears structured to consolidate military authority under a civilian façade—resulting in a state apparatus that remains fundamentally unchanged despite the formal conduct of elections.

Old People, New Names

The junta convened the new parliaments on 16 March 2026, presenting them as functioning legislative institutions. However, despite official narratives emphasizing political change and democratic transition, the composition of both parliamentary leadership and the newly formed government reflects a high degree of continuity with the military regime. Rather than introducing new political actors, the process has largely repositioned existing military leaders and former junta officials into formal parliamentary roles.

In the Pyithu Hluttaw, a former minister from the military regime was appointed as Speaker, while the current Minister of Information, Maung Maung Ohn, assumed the position of Deputy Speaker. In the Amyotha Hluttaw, Aung Lin Dwe—formerly a central figure in the National Defence and Security Council—was appointed as Speaker, alongside Ja Phang Naw Taung, a former member of the State Administration Council and current Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs, as Deputy Speaker. At the state and regional level, a similar pattern is evident, with current and former ministers and chief ministers taking up leadership roles in subnational parliaments. These appointments indicate that parliamentary authority remains closely tied to the existing military-administrative structure.

> Only three countries—Russia, China, and Belarus—extended forms of recognition to the newly convened junta-led Hluttaw, and this recognition was partial and largely symbolic. The messages were delivered primarily through parliamentary and party channels rather than full state-level diplomatic engagement, with China represented by the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party rather than a formal government body. This limited scope of engagement suggests a narrow base of external acknowledgment rather than broad international recognition.

The presidential selection process further underscores this continuity. Vice-presidential candidates were nominated from the Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw, and military-appointed representatives. The Pyithu Hluttaw nominated Senior General Min Aung Hlaing—the coup leader, former Prime Minister of the caretaker government, Chair of the State Administration Council, and self-appointed acting president—as a presidential candidate. The Amyotha Hluttaw selected Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye, a USDP figure from Karen State, marking the inclusion of a female

candidate. However, this appears largely symbolic, as the dominant candidates remain closely aligned with the military establishment. The third nominee, put forward by military representatives, is Nyo Saw, the current Prime Minister and a former general.

Taken together, the current configuration of parliamentary and executive leadership suggests that the transition is largely nominal. Key figures from the military regime have retained power by shifting positions and adopting new institutional titles, rather than relinquishing authority. The rebranding of leadership roles within a parliamentary framework serves to project an image of civilian governance, but in substance, the same actors continue to dominate decision-making structures. As a result, the process reflects continuity rather than transformation, raising serious questions about claims of democratic transition.

Level / Region	New Position	Name	Current / Former Role
Government Leadership	**President**	**Min Aung Hlaing**	Acting President, Coup Leader, and SAC Chairman
	Vice President	**Nyo Saw**	Current Prime Minister and SAC Member
Pyithu Hluttaw	Speaker	**U Khin Yi**	Former Military Minister / USDP Chair
	Deputy Speaker	**U Maung Maung Ohn**	Minister of Information (Current)
Amyotha Hluttaw	Deputy Speaker	**U Aung Lin Dwe**	SAC Secretary / NDSC Chief Executive
	Deputy Speaker	**Ja Phang**	Minister of Ethnic Affairs (Current)
Yangon Region	Chair	-	Minister of Social Affairs, Yangon (Current)
	Deputy Chair	-	Minister of Transport, Yangon (Current)
Mandalay Region	Chair	-	Minister of Security and Border Affairs, Mandalay (Current)
	Deputy Chair	-	Former Minister of Electricity and Energy, Mandalay
Tanintharyi Region	Chair	-	Chief Minister of Tanintharyi (Current)
	Deputy Chair	-	Minister of Natural Resources, Tanintharyi (Current)
Chin State	Chair	-	Minister of Natural Resources, Chin State (Current)
Shan State	Chair	-	Former Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, Shan State

Conclusion

The junta-orchestrated 2025 election falls well short of meeting even minimal standards of electoral legitimacy. The process was fundamentally shaped by structural exclusion, including the removal of roughly 35 percent of the electorate, widespread territorial cancellations, and the absence of credible opposition parties. These constraints were reinforced by restrictive political

regulations, a high number of uncontested constituencies, and the decisive role of advance voting conducted with limited transparency and oversight. In effect, the electoral outcome reflects administrative control rather than genuine political competition, producing a deep and systemic legitimacy deficit.

This deficit is most visible in ethnic areas, where the gap between the formal electoral process and political realities on the ground is particularly stark. Large portions of these regions were excluded from voting entirely, while participating areas experienced significantly lower turnout under conditions of insecurity, displacement, and limited political choice. Many communities were effectively denied meaningful participation, and where voting did occur, it often took place within a tightly constrained environment that undermines the representativeness of the results.

At the same time, ethnic areas do not provide a basis for legitimizing the junta's electoral project; rather, they underscore its limitations. While some ethnic-affiliated parties achieved localized gains, these outcomes reflect constrained and strategic voting behaviour in the absence of credible alternatives. In many cases, voters sought to avoid supporting military-backed candidates rather than to endorse the broader electoral framework. As such, electoral outcomes in these regions should be understood as partial and conditional expressions of political preference, not as indicators of acceptance or legitimacy.

Given these realities, the international community should not overlook or misinterpret the election as a meaningful step toward political normalization. Any narrative that frames the process as representative risks obscuring the scale of exclusion, the depth of the legitimacy deficit, and the voices of those—particularly in ethnic areas—who were unable or unwilling to participate. A more grounded response requires acknowledging these structural limitations and ensuring that engagement, policy responses, and future initiatives are informed by the lived realities on the ground, rather than by formal electoral outcomes that fail to capture them.

Annex 1. Election Result and USDP Dominance in Ethnic Areas

State	Political Party	Abbr.	Seats Won
Kachin	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**45**
	Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party	TNDP	4
	Kachin State People's Party	KSPP	3
	National Unity Party	NUP	2
	Lisu National Development Party	LNDP	2
	New Democracy Party (Kachin)	NDP-K	2
	Myanmar Farmer's Development Party	MFDP	1
	People's Pioneer Party	PPP	1
Kayah	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**19**
	Kayah State People's Party	KySPP	3
	People's Pioneer Party	PPP	2
	National Unity Party	NUP	1
Karen	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**20**
	Karen National Democratic Party	KNDP	8
	Pa-O National Unity Party	PNUP	3
	Phlone-Sqaw Democratic Party	PSDP	2
Chin	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**12**
	Zomi National Party	ZNP	8
	New Chinland Congress	NCC	1
Rakhine	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**17**
	Arakan Front Party	AFP	8
	Rakhine Nationalities Party	RNP	7
Mon	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**19**
	Mon Unity Party	MUP	16
	National Unity Party	NUP	2
	National Interest and Development Party	NIDP	2
	People's Pioneer Party	PPP	1
	People's Party	PP	1
	Pa-O National Development and Progress Party	—	1
Shan	Union Solidarity and Development Party	**USDP**	**54**
	Shan & Nationalities Democratic Party	SNDP	19
	Pao National Organization	PNO	15
	Danu National Democracy Party	—	5
	Inn National League Party	—	4
	National Unity Party	NUP	2
	Wa National Party	—	1
	Akha National Development Party	—	1